



News Release

**US Army Corps
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OMAHA -- The U.S. District Court in Aberdeen, S.D., late yesterday ordered the Army Corps of Engineers to maintain the current level of Lake Oahe for at least another week to help protect the rainbow smelt spawning season now underway in the big reservoir.

U.S. District Judge Charles Kornmann directed the Corps to keep the lake's level at 1596 feet until May 9 when he will conduct another hearing. Poor runoff from melting snow on the plains and mountains has prevented rising lake levels necessary for successful fish spawning.

Current releases from Fort Randall Dam near Chamberlain will be maintained to support downstream uses. The combination of this release schedule and reduced flows from Oahe Dam means the level of Lake Francis Case will continue to fall at a rate of about 4 inches per day. It has dropped 2 feet in the past week and will drop another 2 feet to an elevation of 1350 feet by May 9.

The state of South Dakota filed suit on April 25 to hold releases from Oahe through May 22 to protect the eggs now being laid by the rainbow smelt. This fish is an important food source for highly valued game fish such as walleye and salmon.

Three years of drought have significantly lowered storage levels in the three largest Corps Missouri River reservoirs. The Corps coordinated this year with the Missouri River Natural Resources Committee, a group of state and federal biologists. They recommended steady to rising levels in Fort Peck Lake, Lake Sakakawea and Oahe this spring to help the annual fish spawn. They

went on say that if were not possible, then stable or slightly rising levels in Fort Peck and Sakakawea and declining levels in Oahe is the option with the fewest overall negative impacts.

Curtailling downstream releases enough to provide steady or rising levels in Oahe and the other mainstem lakes would mean a drop to winter release rates of 13,000 cubic feet per second from Gavins Point Dam. Such a reduction would threaten the spawning of fish in the reaches below Fort Randall and Gavins Point dams, powerplants could risk violating water quality standards, and commercial navigators would have to remove towboats and barges from the river.

Corps rangers and tribal members have increased monitoring of the Lake Francis Case shoreline for exposed Indian cultural sites. Disturbing or vandalizing such sites is a federal crime carrying significant fines and jail time.

Irrigators and ranchers on the lake are urged to take necessary precautions to protect equipment and livestock as the lake level falls. Boaters and fishermen should also exercise extra caution as underwater hazards are exposed or lurk immediately below the surface.

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Daily and forecast reservoir and river information is available on the Missouri River basin water management section of the Northwestern Division homepage at: www.nwd.usace.army.mil.